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# Northern Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)

## Nebraska Forest Service

The northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*) has a national reputation. Oak was selected by the National Arbor Day Foundation as the National Tree for the United States and a northern red oak was planted in Washington, D.C. to commemorate the vote in 2001. Oaks grow in every state in the Union. Red oak is possibly the most popular of the oaks, especially in the Nebraska – Iowa region. Bur oak may run a strong second. *Quercus* means oak in Latin and *rubra* means red. Red oak is native from the east coast all the way to the center of the country including Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma. Florida is the only exception. Oak is an important commercial species and its wood is used for fine furniture as well as flooring, cabinetry, and veneer for paneling. And in the winter, oak makes great firewood.



Red oak is planted regularly in Iowa and Nebraska and may be the easiest of the oaks to propagate. It is a hardy tree with strong branching and lovely spreading crown. Red Oak prefers moist, deep, rich, well-drained soils of slightly acidic pH. It adapts readily to dry soils of acidic, neutral, or slightly alkaline pH (some specimens develop chlorosis in high pH soils). It thrives in full sun to partial sun (but is shade tolerant in youth). This adaptability has made it a popular tree in the nursery trade.

Northern red oak is the state tree of New Jersey. Iowa names Oak as the state tree so that will include northern red oak. The leaves of red oak are alternate, moderately shiny, and have seven to eleven lobes with bristles terminating each tooth. The toothed lobe is a characteristic that separates the red oak family from the white oak family. Northern red oak can be impressive in its fall coloration with colors varying from deep red to scarlet. The tree can also have golden- yellow, yellow-brown, or chartreuse foliage in autumn.

Northern red oak is a large forest tree. The largest red oak in the nation is 405 inches in circumference, 80 feet tall and has a spread of 102 feet. It is located in Monroe, NY.



The seed of oak is an acorn. Squirrels love them and in the fall can be seen packing them away to some unknown burial spot for use later in winter. Oak in general is easy to grow from seed if you can beat the squirrels to it.

Since the oak is considered to be a strong tree it is often mistaken as a slow growing tree. In reality, oak, and in particular red oak, is a relatively fast growing tree putting on as much as 18 to 24 inches of height growth per year after establishment. Growth rates slow down as the tree matures but oaks can provide long lasting beauty very soon after planting.

